HOMOPHILY-HETEROPHILY THEORY AS A CRRELATE OF EFFECTIVE

REFERENCE SERVICES: THE CASE OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY MINNA LIBRARY

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Abstract

The study examined the homophily-heterophily theory as a correlate of effective reference services: the case of Federal University of Technology Minna. The objectives of the study was to determine the causes homophily, causes heterophily, and to identify the calibre of staff and users that are influenced by these theories. Data collection was through the use of structured questionnaires which were analysed using simple percentages. The targeted population were the staff and users of Federal University of Technology Minna library.

INTRODUCTION /BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The operational terms to be discussed and understood in this paper are homophily heterophily theory and reference services. As information professionals, we know that reference services are direct personal assistance to users in their quest for information. Katz (1974) is agreed to this and provides a four category analysis of reference questions and services. These imply from the very simple questions that take little time to very complex questions that demand, expertise and various search strategies of the librarians.

On the other hand, homophily -heterophily theory according to Burgon and Ruffner (1988) refers to the degree which interacting individuals are similar in certain attributes. Burgon and Ruffner (1988) are of the view that attributes that lead to homophily are demographic characteristics like age, education, socio economic status, attitudes, belief and values. They posit that the degree in which people differ in the above attributes is the heterophily between them.

The above preamble shows that this theory, even though from the communication arts would have an impact on information communication in libraries. The Reference Librarian and his staff have been entrusted with the task of assisting users exploit the library's stock of accumulated wisdom of mankind. Nwalo (2000) opined that no matter how well and systematic the materials are organized no matter how good the catalogue is, personal assistance to the user in exploiting the information resources is essential. The Reference Librarian is a link between the information and the user. The homophily-heterophily theory has serious implications for reference services in libraries because the search strategy consists of steps the Reference Librarian would use in supplying the required information. According to Neill (1984) as quoted by Aina (2003),the Reference librarian would first analyse and clarify the query; identify the type of reference service; identify the information source to use. This means that the success of the contact between the Reference Librarian and the user , that is the success of the reference transaction depends on how well, the two parties have cooperated during this transaction. Katz (1974) , lending support to the above observed that, if every user were able to formulate his question clearly, half of the problem would have been solved. Many users have vague ideas of what they need and might mislead the Reference Librarian into providing an unacceptable answer. This could be as a result of (a)doubt on ability and competence of the Librarian (b)inferiority or superiority complex (c)limitation of language (d) limitation of user knowledge by the librarian (e)lack of proper communication skills (f)attitude of the Librarian to the user (g)users notion of the Reference Librarian. All the above mentioned factors that could impede effective reference services ,according to Katz (1974) are hinged on the homophily heterophily theory which simply means the extent to which interacting individuals are similar or dissimilar in certain

attributes.

Statement of the problem

A lot of librarians shy away from reference services either as a result of the way they perceive themselves, or the way other people perceive them. When it comes to posting librarians to Reference Sections of University libraries, the University librarians tends to engage in many consultations as to which officer would be most suitable for Reference Department. Clarke (1997) is agreed to this as he articulates some of the qualities of the Reference Librarian in the following words " he should be amicable and approachable at all times, he must have the desire to help the enquirer at all times.".Nwalo (2000) corroborated it by opining that the Reference Librarian should be empathetic ,resourceful, and attentive amongst other qualities. This is because the Reference section is the image or public relations office of that University library.

In view of the above, it has become pertinent to carry out this study to know how homophily heterophily theory could be a correlate of effective reference services in Academic libraries using Federal University of Technology Minna Library as a case study. It has become pertinent as this theory in communication has to do with beliefs, values, attitudes and other demographic peculiarities between source of information and receiver of information which would bring about a change in behaviour, Adebisi (1994). This change in behaviour if it is satisfaction from the clientele shows that the reference service was effective.

Research Questions

1.   What are the causes of homophily ?.
2.   What are the causes of heterophily ?.
3.   What caliber of staff are influenced by these theories.
4.   What caliber of users are influenced by these theories.

Objectives of the study

This study is set to achieve among other things the following;
i.   To determine what causes homophily.
ii.   To determine what causes heterophily
iii.   To identify the calibre staff; influenced by these theories.
iv.   To identify the caliber of users that are influenced by these theories.

Significance/justification of the Study

The result of this study will help the staff of the Academic libraries of any Institution to overcome perceived unhealthy attitudes about life and interaction to others.

Secondly, it will bring into consciousness the concept of homophily and heterophily in our dealings with people.

Thirdly, it will make all librarians / reference librarians / staff of all organization discharge their duties efficiently irrespective of negative stereotypes.

Fourthly, it will remove subjectivity and bring objectivity in our interactions with people.

Scope

The University library of the Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria with their staff and users.

Theoretical framework

The Concept of Reference Services

Reference services are direct personal assistance to users in their quest for information. Readers are provided this services on request, Aina (2004) is of the view that clienteles have different reference queries that need to be answered by the Reference librarian. As such, it involves interviewing the clientele to enable the Reference librarians, articulate the problem of the user clearly. This is called reference interview. The reference interview will enable the Reference librarian to determine what sources in the library to use, for provision of answers to the query. In view of the above, Katz (1974) provides a four category analysis of reference questions. This evolves from the very simple questions that take little time to the very complex questions that demands skill and expertise.

These categories range from directional questions e.g direction to the card catalogue, to the ready reference questions or quick reference questions sources e.g where to get the telephone number of an organization which should be the telephone directory. The next category is the specific search transactions. Several sources may be consulted to satisfy users demands. Specific searches involves the librarian anticipating users demands and as such he puts together journal and newspaper articles in vertical files, keep newspaper indexes and some bibliographies to be able to meet such demands e.g a query on menace of cultism in Nigeria universities may involve the above mentioned variety of sources.

The most complex is the research question category. Clarke (1997) is of the view that the research question category entails searches involving a number of library staff and may take several days to complete. Facts and figures may be analysed from a wide range of sources, and even other resource persons, subject specialists, are often consulted for this category of research question as the user knows exactly what he wants. Aina (2004) gave an example of a

research question like the "role of women in the development of librarianship in Africa". He posited that a wide variety of sources would be consulted, and that experts in librarianship may be consulted.

The Concept of homophily heterophily theory

Homophily heterophily theory in communication process was postulated by Burgon and Ruffner (1988). According to them, homophily refers to the degree to which interacting individuals are similar in certain attributes. Attributes that lead to homophily include such demographic characteristics as age, education, socio-economic status. They equally include attributes, beliefs and values. If some people are identical which would be impossible, then they would be completely homophilous. At the opposite end of the dissimilarity continuum is the heterophily between them. Because homophily heterophily involves a variety of attributes, people can be both homophilous and heterophilous with another person at the same time e.g two people in the same profession are homophilous along the line of occupation. They may be heterophilous on political ideologies, beliefs and values. In the same vein, two people may be highly homophilous in terms of age, sex, race, educational status and background but heterophilous in beliefs and values.

Homophily heterophily and reference services: an interplay:

The homophily heterophily relationship between a sources and receiver will affect their communication transactions. Simply put, this phenomenon will affect reference services as the reference librarian may not effectively give personal reference assistance/ reference service to a heterophilous clientele/user. This is because both of them on seeing each other at first sight may dislike themselves because of perceived differences in ideologies, values, beliefs, socio-economic status etc. This instant dislike for each other as a result of the above mentioned heterophilistic features will affect the reference interview process. Aina (2004) is agreed to this in the following words "The reference interview is very critical in the whole process because once the staff does not have a complete understanding of the query, he/she may not be in a position to provide the necessary reference service to the user". In stating some attributes of the reference librarian Clarke (1997) opined among other things that he should;

(a)   have the desire to help the enquirer and be approachable at all times. That is, he must be accommodating and amicable.

(b)   He must be patient in following up cases, he should consult the resources   within and outside his library so as to keep abreast with developments.

(c)   He should have a high degree of bibliographical knowledge, flexibility of   m i n d

and of the right psychological approach to information seekers.

All the above mentioned qualities are in theory. It is hardly attainable in practice, but when at all, the Reference librarian demonstrate these qualities, its usually to a homophilous clientele. An indepth look at the scenario will show that they have the same political ideologies, socio-economic status, same values, same beliefs.

Research Methodology

In the course of this study ,survey research design was used, using Federal University of Technology Minna as a case study. Aina and Ajiferuke (2000) assert that social survey research ,involves systematic and comprehensive collection of information about the opinions ,attitudes, feelings beliefs, and behaviours of people ..Data collection is often accomplished through observations ,interviews ,and by administering questionnaires on a representative sample of the population of interest.

Population of the Study

The population of the study were the seventy(70) library staff of the Federal University of Technology Minna, and the ten thousand (10,000) registered users of the library. The research sample size which was chosen by systematic sampling , is one thousand (1,000).registered users. The one thousand registered users (10 %)out of ten thousand were deemed representative. Out of a total staff of seventy(70), fifty-five(55) filled and returned their questionnaires. The fifty-five(55) filled questionnaires , representing 78 .5% of staff ,were analysed. .A total of 1050 questionnaires were distributed to the users, but 1000 returned theirs ,representing 10% of the population of registered users. This 10% was deemed to be representative.

Data analysis and discussion of results.

Out of a total working staff of 70 people, in FUT Library Minna,55 filled and returned their questionnaires representing 78.5%.Out of a total population of 10,000 registered users of the library,1,000 users were chosen by systematic random sampling. About 1000 users or 10% of the population of the population was deemed representative. Four research questions were formulated to guide the focus of the investigation..

The questionnaire items that make up research question 1---"What are the causes of homophily" (a) does membership of the same religion encourage homophily ?(b) does wearing the same dress code encourage homophily (c)does speaking the same language encourage homophilly? About 633 respondents or 60% of the sampled population agreed to all the questionnaire items that made up research question1,as

the causes of homophily, while 300 respondents 21.41% disagreed, 122 respondents 11.56% were undecided.

The questionnaire items that make up research question 2 --- "what are the causes of heterophily" (a) does membership of different religion support heterophily? (b)does wearing different dress code support heterophily (c) does speaking different language support heterophily? To this research question, 600 respondents out of 1055 representing 56.87% agreed to all questionnaire items, that made up research question2, 400 resspondents 37.91% disagreed while 55% were undecided.

The questionnaire items that make up research question 3---"what are the calibre of staff that are influenced by these theories" (a) are staff with limited education influenced by these theories ?(b)are staff with low socio-economic status influenced by these theories?(c) are staff with limited exposure/enlightenment influenced by these theories? To this research question,700 out of the 1055 representing 66.35% agreed to all the questionnaire items that made up research question 3, 320 respondents representing 30.33% disagreed while 35(3.31%) were undecided.

The questionnaire items that made up research question 4 "what are the caliber of users that are influenced by these theories" (a) are users with low socioeconomic status influenced by these theories (b)are users with limited exposure/enlightenment affected by these theories (c) are users with stereotyped beliefs affected by these theories?

To this research question, 720(68.24%) agreed to all the questionnaire items that made up research question 4, 330 respondents(31.27%) disagreed and 5 respondents (0.47%) a negligible percentage were undecided.

Conclusion

It is pertinent at this juncture to relate the conclusion with the objectives of this research.

Objective1: To determine what causes homophily. This objective has been determined and taken care of by research question 1.To this objective ,majority of the respondents agreed that the statements/ questions that made up that research question were the causes the causes of homophily in FUT library. About 60% agreed,28.4 % disagreed and 11.5% were undecided .Therefore objective 1 of this study has been determined.

Objective2: To determine what causes heterophily. This objective has been taken care of and determined by research question2. Majority of the respondents agreed that the statements/ questions that made up research2 were the causes of heterophily. About 56.87% agreed,while37.91 % disagreed and 5.21 were undecided. Therefore, objective 2 of this study has been determined.

Objective3: To identify the calibre of staff influenced by these theories. This objective has been taken care of and determined by research question3. About 66.35% agreed to all the questionnaire items that made up research question3, 30.33% disgreed

and 3.31% were undecided. Therefore objective 3 of this study has been identified.

Objective4: To identify the calibre of users ,that are influenced by these theories. This objective has been taken care of by research question4. About 68.24% agreed to all the questionnaire items that made up research question4, 31.27% disagreed and 0.47% were undecided. Therefore objective4 of this study has been determined.

Recommendation

This study has successfully brought to light, the concept of homophily-heterophily and its impact on library services generally, and reference services particularly. There should be formal training on these theories in library schools ,to make librarians deliver their services efficiently. Secondly the entrenchment of these theories in the curriculum of library schools all over the world, would make librarians to overcome negative stereotypes, and overcome subjectivity in approaching their clienteles.

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